



Thai-riffic! **by Oliver Phommavanh**

Years 5 to 7

Background

'Same same, but different. It's what Thai people say when they're talking about something similar, like a fake watch or copied DVD. It feels and looks the same but it's not the real thing. I know how that fake watch feels. I am a fake Aussie. I was made in Thailand. People can spot it right away. I sound like an Aussie but I smell like Thai food. I live in Australia but my house is a Thai restaurant' (Phommavanh, page 3).

Oliver says about his book at <http://www.oliverwriter.com/base/>

*'So what is *Thai-riffic!* about?*

Have you ever had an embarrassing family? Maybe your parents have weird jobs that they can't stop talking about. Or maybe your parents do crazy things in front of your friends. Lengy has that problem and more. He's a Thai kid who's sick of being Thai. (You would too, if you were having Thai food every single night!) He wants to keep his background a secret...which is hard to do when his parents are around. They own a Thai restaurant called THAI-RIFFIC! and want the whole world to eat there...

So just when he's about to start high school, his parents have this crazy idea to bring more customers to their restaurant. An idea that includes embarrassing Lengy to new extremes!

So, how do you stop your parents invading your life? He'll need his new friends and a wacky teacher to help him come up with his own crazy plans...for a normal life. And a slice of cheesy pizza!

Focus: Humour

*Responding to literature: Students learn to identify personal ideas, experiences and opinions about literary texts and discuss them with others. They learn how to recognise areas of agreement and difference, and how to develop and refine their interpretations through discussion and argument. (ACARA, 2010, *The Australian Curriculum: English*)*

As is apparent from the introduction above, Phommavanh, a stand-up comedian, explores a range humorous situations and techniques in *Thai-*

riffic!, such as clever word play and slapstick (the ‘mud war’ at the Water Festival is a good example, page 104).

- Discuss with students the different types of humour around them – in their own social circle, on television or in film, in games or on the internet.
- Why does something one person finds funny not work for another?
- Is our appreciation of humour age or gender based? Discuss, with examples. Students might like to do some research here, such as seeing whether male and female class members find the same jokes funny, or the same examples of humour in *Thai-riffic*.
- One of the appealing aspects of this book is that Lengy’s physical pranks are appreciated by others (such as the monks, Barry Roberts and Mr Winfree) and his playful attitude is rewarded rather than punished. Do you think the author is saying something about the importance of being able to see the funny side of things?
- In the chapter ‘Sticky Notes’, (page 127) Mr Winfree has second-guessed all the potential troublemakers in the class in a clever and funny way through the sticky notes and cd. What would be on the sticky notes he would write for each student in your class? Ask each student to write their own and then share with the rest of the class.

Focus: Word play

Creating literature: Students learn how to use personal knowledge and literary texts as starting points to create imaginative writing in different forms and genres and for particular audiences. Using print, digital and online media, students develop skills that allow them to convey meaning, address significant issues and heighten engagement and impact. (ACARA, 2010, The Australian Curriculum: English)

Language variation and change

Understand the influence and impact that the English language has had on other languages or dialects and how English has been influenced in return.

Language for interaction

Understand how conventions of speech adopted by communities influence the identities of people in those communities understanding that our use of language helps to create different identities (ACARA, 2010, The Australian Curriculum: English page 22)

Thai-riffic! contains excellent examples of word play and puns. Re-read the chapter ‘Thai-Town’ - from page 136. Phommavanh plays with the names of

restaurants to great effect, for example 'The Besta Pasta', 'Thaitanic', 'Thai-riffic', 'Bow Thai' and 'Thai Me Kangaroo Down, Sport'.

Assessment

- Discuss students' knowledge of similar words that seek to create memorable shop names. For example 'Holy Sheet' for a linen shop and 'Combing Attractions' for a hairdressers or 'Curl Up and Dye', 'Just Falafs' for a Falafel restaurant, 'A Brewed Awakening' for a coffee shop, 'Cycloanalysts' for a bike shop, 'Sofa so Good' for a furniture shop and 'Sole-Man' for a shoe shop.
- Have students recreate their own street walk that has the characters considering the names as Phommavanh does with Lengy and his family. This could be written as a script and performed, recorded as a radio play with sound effects or students could recreate the shop name logos as part of a slide show.

The Word Spy and *Return of the Word Spy* by Ursula Dubosarsky and Toby Riddle and *Let Stalk Strine* and *Nose Tone Unturned* by Afferbeck Lauder would be useful resources for this study.

Related Reading

Nips X11 by Ruth Starke

Nips go National by Ruth Starke

Punjabi Pappadam by Robert Newton

My name is Will Thompson by Robert Newton

Staying alive in year 5 by John Marsden

Don't call me Ishmael by Michael Gerard Bauer

'Exotic Rissole' by Tanveer Ahmed in *Growing up Asian in Australia* edited by Alice Pung